RMIT University
Learning and Teaching Investment Fund 2008
Final Report

Project title
Establishing a Multi-dimensional Quality Framework for Assessing Workplace Learning

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Funds approved
$34,700

Funds acquitted (attach financial statement)
$35,525

Introduction
This project is aimed at developing a framework for assessing work based learning at RMIT. Work-based learning, known as Work Integrated Learning (WIL) is a signature component of study at RMIT and takes many forms including industry projects, field work, internships, practicum, and co-op years. Work based learning, because it is composed of the application of academic skills to the workplace, plus the development of generic workplace capabilities, requires assessments that specifically measure the acquisition and development of these skills and abilities.

Detailed project description and outline of what was done
The questions pursued in this study were:
- What assessments are currently being used to assess student performance in work based learning in higher education at RMIT and selected other Australian universities?
- What are the components that are integral for a quality assessment framework?

Three major investigations were conducted:
- A literature review of existing practices on innovative assessment tools found in the Australian higher education context.
- An in-depth mapping of assessment practices in a sample of WIL courses in the College of Business.
- A survey of the perceptions by stakeholders, namely students, academia and industry, of the effectiveness of existing assessment practices in co-op programs in the College of Business, as well as the views of academics at other universities.

The findings of the research were synthesised and from this an assessment framework was developed. The framework that emerged from these investigations has been labelled The Assessment CCARDS Framework. This framework identifies the critical components to be taken into consideration when assessing work based learning, which include:
- Context of the learning – Learning in the workplace is considerably different from learning in academia
- Capability driven learning. Many of the capabilities developed in the workplace are the generic employability attributes required by all professions. However, the workplace also offers students opportunities to develop their discipline-specific capabilities through the application in a specific workplace context.

Action learning. The workplace environment offers students much greater...
opportunity to be active learners than the classroom

- Reflective learning. Reflective practices are necessary for students to be able to articulate the skills and knowledge acquired in the workplace
- Developmental learning. Students require feedback from employers and academics to be able to advance their learning. Formative feedback plays a critical role in workplace assessment.
- Student focused learning. Workplace learning requires students to take greater responsibility and account of their own learning

The Assessment CCARDS Framework is intended to serve as a guideline for academic staff involved in creating assessment tools to assess workplace learning.

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<tr>
<th>Attach the full and detailed report and evaluation of your project outcomes including evidence of the impact the project has had. Also make reference to how the outcomes address the five key objectives:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Improved student learning experiences, outcomes and employment opportunities</td>
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<td>Innovation</td>
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<td>Strategic alignment</td>
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<td>University wide application</td>
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<td>Value for money</td>
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The key outcome of this project was the development of the Assessment CCARDS Framework. The research and development of the framework addressed RMIT’s LTIF objectives in the following way:

- Improved student learning experiences, outcomes and employment opportunities
  The majority of students surveyed were satisfied with the assessment program and felt that the experience prepared them for graduate employment. Connections between the high (67%) percentage of satisfied WIL student and CEQ performance requires further investigation.

  The valuable work experience and capability development that students gain in co-op placement translates directly into a high rate of graduate employment.

- Innovation
  WIL programs, especially co-op, offer students a learning environment which exists outside the traditional classroom and discipline boundaries. This necessitates teaching and learning approaches that go beyond traditional practices. Unfortunately, many WIL assessment practices do not reflect this difference, as evidence by this research. The CCARDS Assessment Framework provides a framework to develop assessments that are specifically matched to the workplace learning environment and are more innovative than those found in traditional academic courses. Innovations may include involving employers to appraise workplace performance, academics measuring the real life application of learning and the development of generic employability skill and students self reflection on their own development.

  The practices in the School of Business Information Technology illustrate innovative formative and summative assessment practices in a WIL program with the following components:
  - Reflective journal
  - WIL student teams
  - Peer, alumni and academic mentoring
  - Feedback from academics and workplace supervisors
  - eLearning tools that support workplace learning

- University Wide Application
  This project focused on the College of Business and it is now recommended to validate the model and extend its application to the other academic Colleges at RMIT.

- Value for Money
  RMIT has made a significant commitment to increasing the opportunities for students to integrate their academic learning with the
This project has begun to address one of the critical issues in this type of learning, and that is, measuring what has actually been learnt. The funding awarded to this project has enabled the stakeholders involved in workplace learning, the students, academics and industry, to be surveyed; the literature to be reviewed and this collective information to be synthesised and used to develop an assessment framework. The research has provided a solid foundation on which to progress the CCARDS Assessment Framework throughout the academic Colleges at RMIT, as well as to academics in other universities.

### Dissemination of project outcomes both completed and planned. This should include both within RMIT and externally.

#### 2008 Presentations

#### Presentations Planned for 2009
- College of Business Learning and Teaching Seminar, June 2009
- College of Business Learning and Teaching Poster Session, August 2009
- School Learning and Teaching Seminars
- RMIT Learning and Teaching Expo
- World Association for Collaborative Education Conference
- Australian Collaborative Education Network Conference

#### Planned Publications 2009
- RMIT’s Educational Journal
- Journal of Education and Work (3)
- The International Journal of Higher Education and Educational Planning. Editor-in-Chief: Grant Harman, Journal no. 10734 (rating 0.6), Springer Netherlands
- HERDSA Journal - Higher Education Research and Development (HERD)
- Vocational Education Journal - Vocat Educ J ISSN (printed): 0884-8009

### Professional Development Workshops Planned for 2009
- **Assessments for WIL**, College of Business (but offered in the Open Program) April 1

#### Summary of the project, outcomes, impacts and dissemination

This LTIF project sought to investigate existing practices of assessing workplace learning at RMIT, as well as further the field, with a view of examining the suitability of these practices for a new learning paradigm. This new paradigm is one which extends learning beyond the classroom and into the workplace. Learning in the workplace sets a new context for learning, requires new skills to be learnt and necessitates a new application of academic learning. The study found, through the literature and surveys of students, academics and employers, that that this new learning model also requires new assessment measures.

The assessment measures that are deemed suitable for assessing workplace learning take into consideration the specific workplace context of the learning; the development of generic professional skills required in the world of work; the application of discipline specific expertise to workplace tasks and projects; and a shift in responsibility for learning where the student is more self-directed, reflective and active; which is supported and nurtured by feedback from academics and workplace.

These considerations have been encapsulated in the *Assessment LTIF Report: Developing a Quality Assessment Framework for WIL*, Feb 20, 2009
CCARDS Framework (Context, Capabilities, Action Learning, Reflection, Developmental, Student-centred) which is intended to serve as guide for academics in the development of their assessment tools.

As WIL courses are new to some academics it is envisaged that through professional development workshops and other forums at RMIT academics will have the opportunity to develop and customise suitable work based assessment for their WIL courses using the Assessment CCARDS as a reference point.

Further development and dissemination of this assessment framework will be pursued through learning and teaching forums, conferences and publication, at RMIT: in the WIL field and in the general academic arena.